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LAYLA- MAJNU



BY
DHAN
GOPAL
MUKERJI

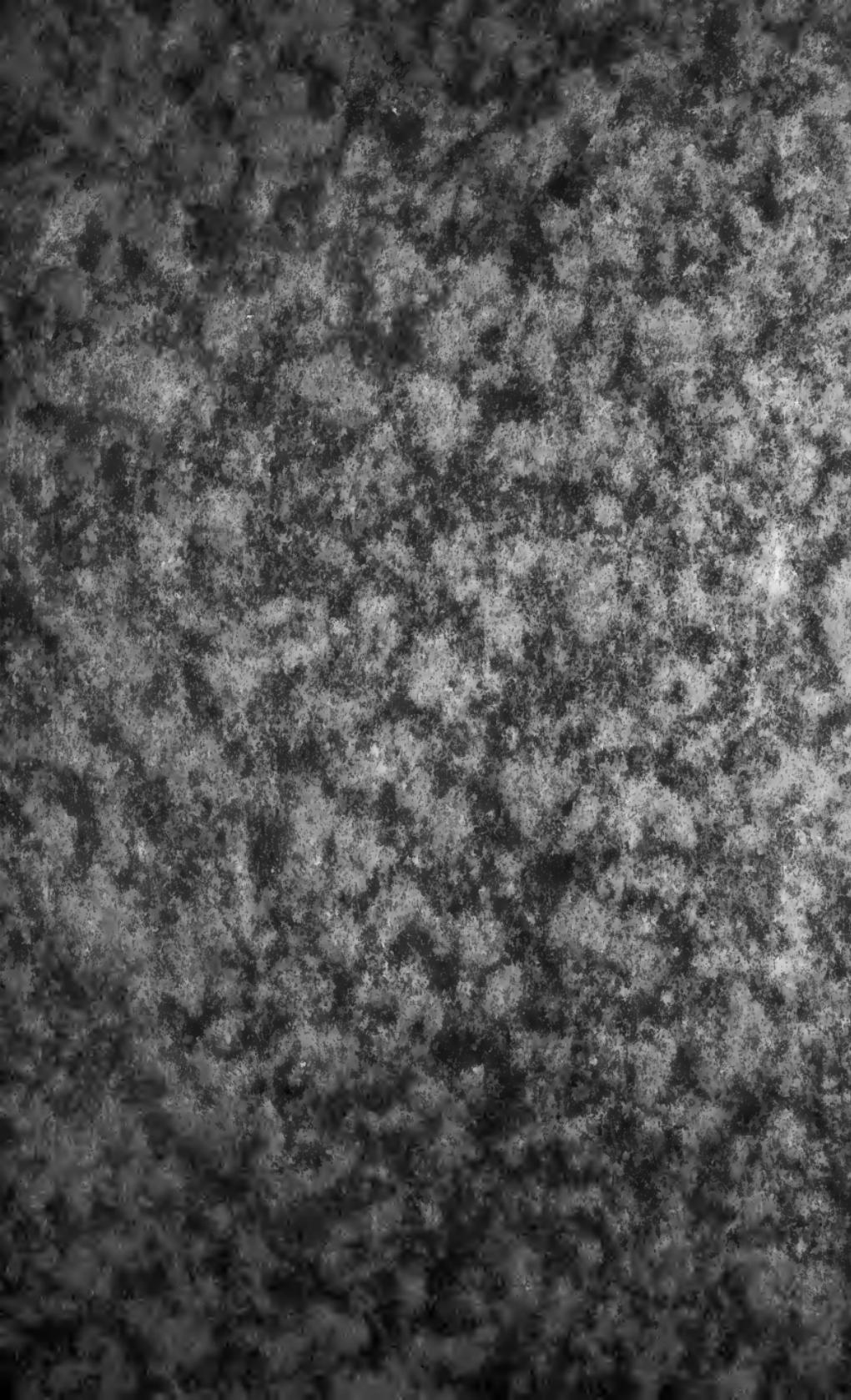
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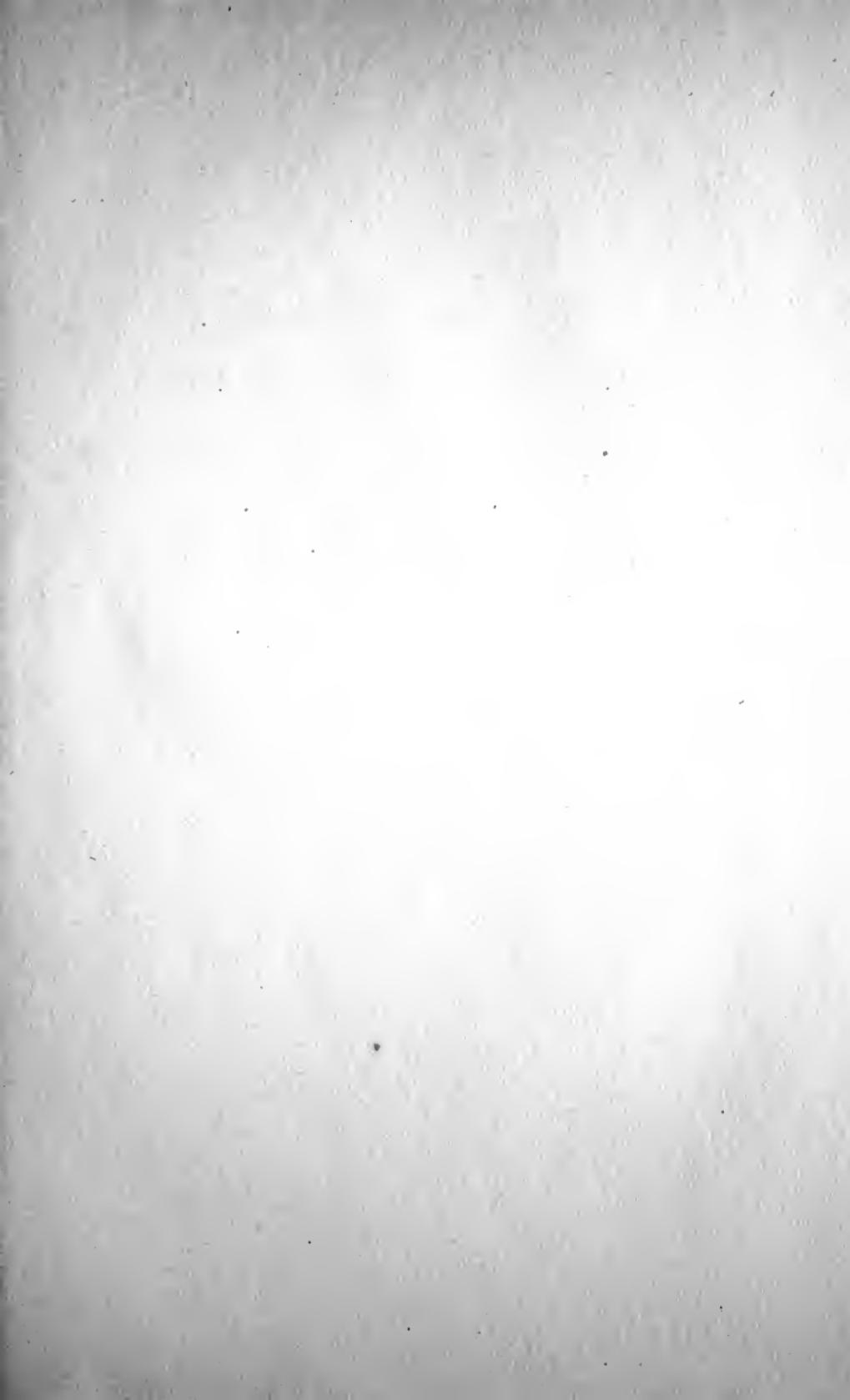




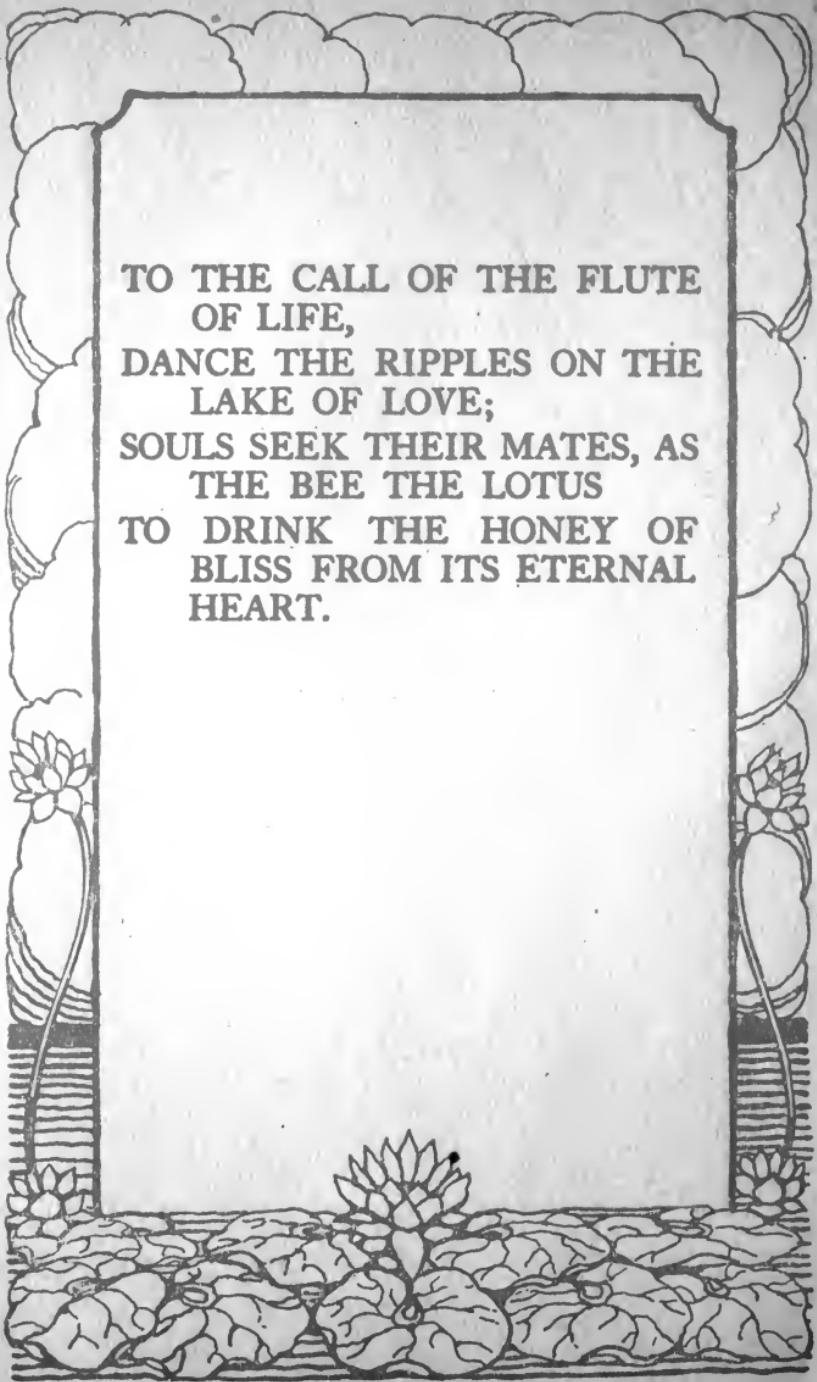
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TO THE CALL OF THE FLUTE
OF LIFE,
DANCE THE RIPPLES ON THE
LAKE OF LOVE;
SOULS SEEK THEIR MATES, AS
THE BEE THE LOTUS
TO DRINK THE HONEY OF
BLISS FROM ITS ETERNAL
HEART.



LAYLA-MAJNU

A MUSICAL PLAY
IN THREE ACTS

By

DHAN GOPAL MUKERJI

WITH AN INTRODUCTION
BY PROFESSOR ARTHUR UPHAM POPE
UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA



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To
MRS. FLORENCE STABLER BLACKMAN

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Introduction

DESPITE her infinite services to civilization, India remains to the western world something of a mystery. India, the mother of religions, the founder of sciences, with an art both opulent and spiritual, a culture unique and incredibly rich, is still for most of us a romantic fable, without substance and without meaning. To capture something of the flavor of this extraordinary people and to present it with vividness and charm is a worthy and important service — nay, more, is an achievement of art as well, for it seems to be an essential of art, and one of the sources of its power, that it comprehends the inner life of a people, its experiences, faiths, ideals, and gives to them eloquent and moving expression, appealing to sense and emotion as well as to understanding. Such an achievement is Mr. Mukerji's in this exotic little play which might fairly be called "*A Vision of India.*" From the fabulously rich treasury of Indian culture, he has refashioned in an original and personal way a characteristic jewel, having the richness, the luster, the strange play of shifting colors that has made India a synonym for romantic magnificence. In addition to this visual splendor Mr. Mukerji has, with many vivid suggestions that kindle the imagination, presented some essential aspects of the many-sided Indian life — emotion, intense but sincere and refined; love, fervid and imaginative; genuine and exalted chivalry; the steady and universal pressure

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of spiritual aspiration; the soul-transforming power of religion, with its ideal of utter selflessness—all contrasting gratefully with some traits of our western world, with its rather hard directness, with the thinness and frequent crudity of its emotional life, with its religion so often verbal, conventional, impotent. Of course there are profound and heroic features of Indian life that are not here revealed—intellectual subtlety, sublime patience in suffering—but the first allegiance of the artist is to beauty, and he must not jeopardize æsthetic unity for the sake of sociological comprehensiveness.

But Mr. Mukerji has given us more than a scene out of Indian life; he has transmitted something of its æsthetic genius. Not only is there here much of the tone of the great Indian classics, but something of the spirit of them is transmitted in a way that wins the favor and sympathy of the reader of a wholly different cultural background. This is a considerable and none too common achievement, for the æsthetic genius of any people of genuine individuality is sensitive, and is frequently unable to survive in the process of translation. The great classics of a remote culture like India's when overturned into English, are, unless the translator have rare power, apt to seem dull and fantastic. For those of us who are not attracted to these, a capital introduction to them and a fair appreciation of the spirit of the foreign culture may be acquired through literary works written in our own tongue by writers born into the ancient culture, nourished on its traditions, dis-

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ciplined in its ideals, but at the same time thoroughly familiar not only with our speech idiom but with our intellectual and emotional idiom as well. Mrs. Sarojini Naidu's exquisite lyrics in "The Golden Threshold" were written in English; they are excellent English poetry, but the soul of India has spoken through them, and those who are left indifferent by translated Indian originals are often kindled into ardent enthusiasm through these poems. It is this double success of a rare and important kind that Mr. Mukerji appears to me to have achieved.

ARTHUR UPHAM POPE.

*Berkeley, California
March 15, 1916.*

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

MAJNU	CROWN PRINCE
LAYLA	HIS BELOVED
MOBARAK	AN ARAB ADVENTURER
SHAH ALAM	PRETENDER, BROTHER OF MAJNU
JESTER	
LUTFA UNNISHA	A DANCING GIRL
COURT SINGER	
SLAVE GIRL	FREED BY MAJNU
EUNUCHS (ABYSSINIAN AND ARAB)	
SLAVE GIRLS	
DANCERS (MEN AND WOMEN)	
HERALD, MEN AND WOMEN, DERVISHES, ETC., ETC.	

NOTE.—Throughout the first act Majnu is disguised as a beggar.

LAYLA-MAJNU

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ACT I.



CENE: In the background a stretch of green meadow-land, on the bitter side of which is a small lake. Gold, saffron, violet and pink sunbeams from the right, dance and sparkle on the lake surface. In the foreground, to the left, is a small white house of Moorish architecture, with red roof, and dark entrance that is open. There is a window of a lesser black shade which also is open. The interior of the house, except for glimpses of its cool white walls, is hardly visible. In the middle of the foreground is a clear yellow-white paved yard, supposedly attached to the house. Behind it is a flight of marble steps leading down to the lake. To the right are pathways that lead from without and end in the yard.

As the curtain rises, from within the house are heard snatches of sad Oriental melodies, sung with string accompaniment. The melodies express the soul of a young woman who is hungry for more life. It is hunger for something, though unknown, yet closely related to the heart. They should also express a sense of restraint and dignity. After a

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while the singing ceases; only the stringed instrument is heard, as if moaning.

[Now, walking to the rhythm of the sad, sweet music, enter four women R., one after the other, carrying their pitchers on their heads. They are barefooted and wear many-colored Oriental costumes. Their ornaments consist of bangles, earrings and jingling anklets. Slowly, one after the other, they go down the steps to the lake. As they fill their pitchers [unseen by the audience] they sing. The gurgle of the water is blended with the music.]

THE SONG:

Singing, we scoop
The limpid pool;
The sun's weary smile,
Like love's wile,
Silently our heart-strings pull.

The pale lonely star,
Her glances afar,
Vainly seeks on earth
For her lover's heart
That fell from heaven's bower.

The gold and red sun sets;
The bird seeks her nest;
The pool silently lies

Layla-Majnu

Under stellar eyes
Listening to the sun's last sighs.

[*After the song ceases, the mingled noise of their conversation is heard. They, carrying their pitchers on their heads, come up the steps.*]

FIRST WOMAN

Shall I call Layla?

SECOND WOMAN

No; let us sit down here for a few minutes.

THIRD WOMAN

Come, we would better go. Someone may come.

FOURTH WOMAN

There is no harm if we rest awhile.

[*They put their pitchers on the first step, and squat by them on the ground, facing the audience.*]

THIRD WOMAN

I shall have to be home soon.

FIRST WOMAN

Why? Is your husband back?

Layla-Majnu

THIRD WOMAN

Yes (*petulantly*). He is back.

FOURTH WOMAN

I hear he has made enough money, last caravan trade, to take another wife.

THIRD WOMAN

Not much; but enough to buy Mania.

SECOND WOMAN

Mania! Is she very young?

FIRST WOMAN

That is why he wants her.

THIRD WOMAN

[*Angrily*]

Why? Am I so old? Am I? There are days yet for me. He will yet have to pray at my feet for many days. I am a Tartar!

FIRST WOMAN

Tartar? Sing a Tartar song.

SECOND AND FOURTH WOMEN [*Together*]

Yes, yes; sing one, please.

Layla-Majnu

THIRD WOMAN

[*Smiling*]

But you will have to dance.

FOURTH WOMAN

I do not know the Tartar dance.

THIRD WOMAN

You three dance; jingle your anklets; I will sing.
Dance like fire; that will do.

FIRST WOMAN

Someone may come.

SECOND AND FOURTH WOMEN [*Together*]

We should not mind. Sing, sing.

[*They take hands, stand up, go toward the house, stop near it, then turn around facing R., and wait for the music to begin.*]

THIRD WOMAN

[*Amused*]

Oh, that will not do. Two come here; one stay there. In Tartar we do not dance as here. We dance as if we were going to die. We dance like warriors. Ah, you do not know how great Tartar is!

Layla-Majnu

[*The FIRST WOMAN and the FOURTH come R., turn round, then stand facing the SECOND WOMAN L. The THIRD WOMAN sings with full accompaniment.*]

SONG:

The lion has ceased roaring;
The stars set, one by one;
The dawn drives away the night's hosts
As ye shall your enemy, heroes of our Tartar clan.
Haste, haste, arise from your couch of sleep;
Don your ring armor, iron and gold;
Shoulder your spears; blow your trumpets;
Rush, rush, ye lion-sons of Tartar, noble and bold!

[*This dancing must resemble a war dance. As a rule, Tartars, both men and women, are warlike. As they cease dancing, from without is heard a short Oriental air, played on a flute.*]

FIRST WOMAN [*Hearing the flute*]

Let us go; someone is coming.

[*They lift their pitchers. Exeunt R.*]

[*The flute keeps on playing. Enter stealthily R., MOBARAK and SHAH ALAM; the former is copper-brown and tall, while the latter is ivory-complexioned, with dark, cruel eyes and black hair. SHAH ALAM is of medium stature. They speak in*

*Layla-Majnu
earnest whispers till the flute-playing ceases.]*

MOBARAK

[*Aloud*]

He will die.

SHAH ALAM

How did you learn of that?

MOBARAK

There is a slave girl in the palace, who is my mistress; she tells me that his days are done.

SHAH ALAM

Where is Majnu?

MOBARAK

The Crown Prince?

SHAH ALAM

[*Angrily*]

Yes, my brother.

MOBARAK

No one knows; some say he is with the women and the dancing girls.

SHAH ALAM

Let him have all the women and the wine he

Layla-Majnu

wants; his days are numbered. By Allah, he will pay for—

MOBARAK

Sh—h—! They say he disguises himself—

SHAH ALAM

[*Mystified*]

Disguises?

MOBARAK

He disguises himself as a beggar, and goes about the Capital.

SHAH ALAM

Ha, ha! Just like him!

MOBARAK

No; they say he is looking for someone.

SHAH ALAM

What? Looking for me?

MOBARAK

No, no. No one knows that you are here. Everyone thinks that you are governing your province, far away.

SHAH ALAM

Let them think as they like. They do not know

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me. Even if I am far away, yet I know every-
thing that is happening in this Capital. Ha!
Let Majnu prowl about as a beggar. He can
never know what I am going to do next.
Bismillah! If I do not make him the beggar
that he is playing now, my name is not Shah
Alam. I will have the kingdom; the whole
empire. I will walk to the throne over Majnu's
dead body!

MOBARAK

[*As if to restrain him*]

What do you wish me to do now?

SHAH ALAM

[*Taken aback; then suddenly:*]

Kill him.

MOBARAK

Whom—your father?

SHAH ALAM

Yes; kill the Emperor. No, poison him.

MOBARAK

Poison him?

SHAH ALAM

Yes; poison him.

Layla-Majnu

MOBARAK

No; never!

SHAH ALAM

Why not, you coward?

MOBARAK

Coward! Never dare you call an Arab coward again. I will not poison him. If I want to kill him, I will stab him. Poisoning! I leave that to cowards and women.

SHAH ALAM

Come; you must kill him.

MOBARAK

Kill a dying man? A man whom I have served so well—

SHAH ALAM

And who had you flogged in a crowded bazaar!

MOBARAK

[*Snatches at his dagger, then restrains himself.*]

No! no! I cannot kill him. Why should I kill him? He is dying; let him pass away. He hasn't harmed you. He is old and—

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SHAH ALAM

You won't do it, then?

MOBARAK

No—

[*Footsteps and a voice are heard without R.*]

SHAH ALAM

[*Agitated*]

Come; let us away.

[*Exeunt R. by pathway.*]

[*It should be noticed now that the sunbeams have flickered away; twilight has set in. Enter R. by another pathway, MAJNU and jester-attendant. They are in haste, and pant for breath.*]

JESTER

Oh, what a chase!

MAJNU

You ran so fast.

JESTER

You ran so slow.

MAJNU

Did you observe how I ran?

Layla-Majnu

JESTER

Certainly I did; you ran like a mad dog. [*With excitement*] Hush—sh! Look at the shadows.

MAJNU

Are they coming this way?

JESTER

No. I know them, it seems.

MAJNU

Who are they?

JESTER

One seems to be Shah Alam and the other an Arab.

MAJNU

Shah Alam! How could he be here?

JESTER

Why?

MAJNU

He is far away, ruling his province. He is the viceroy of Maust. That cannot be he.

JESTER

That cannot be he? It must be his ghost, then. I wonder if the Arab is a ghost too.

Layla-Majnu

MAJNU

Stop! [*Looks at the right intently for some time.*]
No—

JESTER

Are you looking at the star of your birth?

MAJNU

I am looking at the star of your death.

JESTER

I wish you could find it.

MAJNU

[*Not paying any attention*]
Did you see Layla today?

JESTER

No.

MAJNU

What did you do with my letter?

JESTER

I left it there. [*Points at the doorstep of the house.*]

MAJNU

Ah, the wind might have blown it away. Why
did you do that?

Layla-Majnu

JESTER

Because she won't see the face of any man but
the beggar's. Since I am no beggar, I left it
there—

MAJNU

Ah, she will see me now. Layla, Layla, how I
love her! Layla, I am a beggar today—beggar
at your door. For your sake, I will remain a
beggar forever.

JESTER

For her sake Shah Alam will do that. He will
kindly take the throne.

MAJNU

What are you talking about? Aren't you happy?

JESTER

Surely, I have to be, for your brother's sake.

MAJNU

You wretch! Can you not let him alone?

JESTER

[*Pleasantly*]

But he won't let you alone. If he takes the
throne from you and then your life, what will
happen to me?

Layla-Majnu

MAJNU

I will employ you as my jester.

JESTER

Jester in hell? No, I have lived in it.

MAJNU

Lived?—

JESTER

I have my hell here; I live with kings and princes.

MAJNU

Yes, the court-life is truly—

JESTER

But I love the court. Your Highness, do give up
this madness. This woman is a witch, like the
rest. She—

MAJNU

How dare you?

JESTER

I am thinking of your life. Shah Alam, I tell
you, will take your life. The court—what
will the court be—

Layla-Majnu

MAJNU

Court? [meditatively] Court, throne, kingdom, the empire—what are they worth? Let Shah Alam have them all. I want Layla. Ah, Layla! how I love her! I will give Shah Alam the whole world; but give me Layla. For her sake I'll be a lifelong beggar.

JESTER

You are moon-struck.

MAJNU

I am struck by the beauty of Layla's moon-face.
Layla, my Layla——

[*Same voice as before is heard from within the house, sadly singing. The JESTER takes MAJNU by the arm and drags him off stage R. Enter Layla L.; she comes out of the house. She is a model of Oriental beauty. There is a deep look in her face. In the slowly fading twilight her face is like a rose veiled by a thin mist, that instead of blurring one's vision enhances the beauty of the object seen. She is dressed in green, and wears vermillion slippers. It should be noticed that she wears no anklets. Layla walks to the steps and seats herself on the first one, facing the audience. She stops sing-*

Layla-Majnu

ing as she takes out of the pitcher a letter and reads it. Then, folding it, slips it underneath her robe, as if to preserve it next to her heart.]

She sings:

I fell asleep,
Hearing melody
That fell from lip to lip:
The stars sang it
To the wind, that took it
To the rose shivering in the cold of
night;
The rose gave it
To the nightingale, who sang it
Back to the stars, the earth, and sea;
And I, to it listening,
Fell asleep, dreaming.

[*During the last lines, she takes the pitcher and goes down the steps. The last notes end with a gurgle of the water brought out with emphasis by the orchestra. Enter JESTER from R., crawling on his stomach. He goes near the steps and peeps at Layla. As MAJNU starts to sing without, R., the JESTER burries off R. Hastily LAYLA comes up the steps with a full pitcher. Hurrying into the house, she shuts the door.]*

[*Enter MAJNU from R., dressed as before, in beggar costume. He is singing.]*

Layla-Majnu

The night weaves her mystery,
The moon mounts her starry height;
The birds dream dreams,
And I seek your smile.

MAJNU

[*Going to the door at the end of the song.*]

Hail, Peace! Allah ho Akbar! Give alms to the
Fakeer.

[*The door opens, revealing LAYLA's face.*]

LAYLA

[*Almost unable to speak.*]

Fakee——!

MAJNU

Give the Fakeer something to eat.

[*Layla goes in, leaving the door half open.*]

MAJNU sings:

I have seen you at spring morn
In autumn's golden garb——

[Enter LAYLA with a large basket full of rice.
MAJNU sits by the doorstep and spreads
his cloth. LAYLA slowly pours the rice in
a half bending posture. (Exquisite music
from now on should interpret the rest of
this scene.) They look at each other.
The rice keeps on falling. They are

Layla-Majnu

simply entranced by each other's eyes. The twilight fades. The stage darkens. There is no more rice in the basket. It has run empty, and over-filled MAJNU's cloth, then has fallen out about him. As LAYLA suddenly becomes conscious of what has happened, the basket nearly falls from her hands. She is half dismayed yet partly conscious. The basket drops from her hands. She rushes into the house and shuts the door. MAJNU stands up as if to follow her. The rice falls all about him from the cloth. The shadows tremble, as if in deep emotion, as the moon is seen rising in the background.]

[CURTAIN]

ACT II.

SCENE: *A chamber — spacious — in one of the wings of the palace. The white walls support a multi-colored ceiling. The ceiling is a network of lines: blue, purple, gold and green. In the back are tall Moorish windows hung with rose-colored curtains. The windows afford a glimpse of a garden in the center of which is a pool. There dance torrents of light shed by the full moon at her zenith. The floor of the chamber is covered with precious Oriental rugs, except a part of the foreground reserved for dancing. There is a cream-colored divan near the window, piled high with cushions. Next to it are two other divans of pink and orange. The chamber is lighted by three huge crystal chandeliers hung from the ceiling with silken ropes. The curtain rises. The stage is empty for a moment.*

[Enter two slaves, one an Abyssinian, the other an Arab. They take the cushions from the divans and scatter them in the shape of a crescent, with the cream-colored divan as its center. As they finish arranging the cushions, they start to go; they collide.]

ABYSSINIAN [*Raising his fist*]

Jahannam!

Layla-Majnu

ARAB

[*Recoiling*]

Bismillah!

[*Takes the dagger that was suspended from his belt. They scowl at each other. Exeunt L.*]

[*Enter R., a SLAVE GIRL, carrying red roses in a large white basket. With great delicacy and taste she scatters roses about the place. She is humming an Oriental air. The orchestra accompanies and describes her action and song so far as it can be called a song. Enter another SLAVE GIRL with yellow Champaks or aromatic flowers of a similar color. She also follows the movement of the FIRST GIRL and scatters flowers.*]

[*Enter two more SLAVE GIRLS bearing wine and glasses. The wines are in various bottles on one tray and the many-colored glasses on another tray. They put their trays near the windows.*]

[*All the SLAVE GIRLS wear as few garments as possible. The FIRST ONE is dressed in green satin ornamented with gorgeous red stripes; the SECOND wears a scarlet dress striped with blue and violet; the THIRD wears a garment of pink with folds of yellow, and the LAST wears a rainbow-colored garment. After they scatter the*]

Layla-Majnu

*flowers and put down the wine, they dance.
Exeunt R. at the end of dance.]*

[*Enter MOBARAK stealthily L. He whistles.*
Enter FIRST SLAVE GIRL R.]

FIRST SLAVE GIRL

Ah, Mobarak! [*Goes to him, arms outstretched*]

ARAB [*Embracing ber*]

What's the news?

FIRST SLAVE GIRL

They will kill you. Why have you come here?

ARAB

But I saw two men here, arranging the cushions.

FIRST SLAVE GIRL [*Giggling*]

They are eunuchs.

ARAB

Eunuchs! Can eunuchs get angry?

FIRST SLAVE GIRL

Eunuchs are everything here. They whip the slave girls; they kill one another; they are

Layla-Majnu

beasts. [*Footsteps without R.*] You must go away. They will kill you, if they see you here.

ARAB

Ah, woman! Who can kill Mobarak, the Arab?
Tell me how he is.

FIRST SLAVE GIRL

He may die at any moment. Go! Run away!

ARAB

[*Holding her in his embrace*]

One word more, my heart. Where is Majnu?

FIRST SLAVE GIRL [*Ecstatically*]

I don't know. [*Embracing him.*] Go! He will be here soon. Go.

ARAB

I will. So——

[*Exit L.*]

[*Exit FIRST SLAVE GIRL R.*]

[*From a distance without L. is heard a flute, playing in the same fashion as in Act I., only it is a little more melancholy now.* Enter FOUR AMIRS *L.* They are young; dressed according to the customs of their

Layla-Majnu

respective Amirets. The FIRST one is dressed in white silken flowing robes, with a mitre of yellow as a head-dress. The SECOND, yellow-white loose costume of western Kabul. He has a yellow-green turban mounted with a diamond at the front. The THIRD is dressed like a Bokbaran. He has a red fez, and a red cloak of velvet, and a white pyjama. His cloak is embroidered with gold. The FOURTH ARAB is wearing a white costume. All four men have pearl-studded shoes. As they enter, they take off their shoes. Enter a EUNUCH. He goes out with the shoes.]

FIRST AMIR

Have you heard anything new?

SECOND AMIR

No. The emperor is well, it seems.

THIRD AMIR

You cannot tell. All these false reports——

FIRST AMIR

Yesterday, when I saw him, he did not seem so.

[As they sit down, the flute ceases playing without.]

Layla-Majnu

FOURTH AMIR

They say Shah Alam is here in disguise.

SECOND AMIR

Now he can put his ability to the test.

FIRST AMIR

How?

SECOND AMIR

Start a rebellion. Majnu is always busy with these. [*Points to wine and flowers.*]

THIRD AMIR

Majnu is not a fool. He appears to be immersed in these; but I tell you, he is more crafty than that brother of his.

FOURTH AMIR

Shah Alam is not good to be the emperor.

FIRST AMIR

He is cruel. He is a savage. Majnu and he are both capricious; but Majnu has a kind heart.

THIRD AMIR

A kind heart in a ruler always leads to fatality.

Layla-Majnu

A cruel ruler personally is safe. But a kind one — never.

SECOND AMIR

Yes; kind persons always suffer—

[*They rise as they see MAJNU enter R., followed by TWO DANCING GIRLS. Then comes a MAN DANCER followed by two OTHER WOMEN. The FIRST TWO WOMEN are dressed in purple, orange, green and blue. Their bosoms are half covered and they are barefooted. MAJNU wears a pale-yellow robe, and a large carbuncle-studded turban. He wears gold-embroidered, pearl-studded shoes. He does not take them off. The NEXT TWO DANCING GIRLS are dressed in pink and saffron of cooler shades. They wear very few jewels. The MAN DANCER wears pink trousers only. He is bronze in complexion, and has good features. His long black hair falls fantastically about his shoulders. The DANCING GIRL that follows him is dressed in shining, black, gauzy silk. There is a large purple amethyst on her bosom, and a girdle of pearls interspersed with diamonds and a few emeralds. A short strand hangs down to her knees in front of her. The end of this string has a huge dazzling diamond set next to a*

Layla-Majnu

medium-sized emerald. On her wrists she wears bangles of thin gold, polished to sparkle. On the backs of her hands she wears, tied with heavy strings of moon-stone, two large topazes. On her insteps she wears two large chrysolites surrounded by beads of lapis lazuli, and tied there with strings of turquoise. She wears chain bracelets on her upper arms, studded with immense opals. Her deep dark hair is dressed with careful negligence. Just above her forehead a very large diamond is pinned to the hair. Next to it are two strings of pearls coming down on her temples, then reaching almost to the corners of her red mouth. She must be slow to enter after those who precede her. There is a noise of mingled exclamations as MAJNU enters. The first four DANCING GIRLS and THE MAN go and stand by their respective cushions. THE AMIRS salute MAJNU. He looks back for the LAST GIRL, who is slowly entering.]

MAJNU

Lutfa, come sit by me.

[She goes toward him; he takes her left hand with his right, and leads her to the divan. She sits down. Consternation among the rest of them.]

Layla-Majnu

MAJNU

[*Standing before the end of the divan and facing the rest.*]

Be seated, Amirs. Dance, my man and my girls.

[*He seats himself beside LUTFA. THE AMIRS take their seats. The dancing commences. The FIRST MAN comes into the foreground, and a little later the FOUR GIRLS join him in dancing. The dancing has four movements.*]

[*First: It is dawn. This dawn is in a city where the courtesans dance their last; and the people, used to keeping late hours, displeased at the advent of the dawn, take their last fill of pleasure.*]

[*Second: It is noon. Five SLAVE GIRLS enter R., bringing trays full of flowers and wine glasses. They stand aside. THE DANCERS execute movements to portray the noonday lassitude that generally overtakes voluptuaries. They drink cool drinks and shred the flower petals and throw them away in sprays.*]

[*Third: It is afternoon. They are preparing themselves for the orgies of the night that is coming.*]

[*THE SLAVES serve wine while the next movement commences.*]

Layla-Majnu

[Fourth: It is night. They dance the dance of pleasure. It is the kindling of the senses — the consummation of everything by plunging all into an abyss of purple.]

[As the dance ends, THE AMIRS applaud; the SLAVE GIRLS nod approval; MAJNU stands up, does not clap; goes to the window and looks out, then comes back slowly. The rest of them talk to one another, not aloud, while the SLAVE GIRLS serve wine. LUTFA looks up at MAJNU, who is leaning against the divan from behind.]

MAJNU

Dance, Lutfa! Dance!

[All look at him and at her, then at the other dancers. LUTFA begins to dance. MAJNU is looking out of the window at the calm of nature without. LUTFA dances the fire of passion, of the calm of the soul. The passions and the soul are at strife. It is the dance of a struggle. The other dancers are about her and supplement her. MAJNU is drawn by it from his contemplation of nature. He is simply transfixed; so are THE AMIRS. Passion becomes victorious over the soul. The dance is completed. They applaud. Noise with-

Layla-Majnu

out: a woman and a man screaming and shouting. With the ceasing of the noise of applause, the noise without ceases. MAJNU goes up to LUTFA and leads her by the hand to one of the divans. The orchestra resumes playing. The OTHER DANCERS begin to dance. THE SLAVES join in. LUTFA, MAJNU and THE AMIRS watch them from near the windows. This is the dance of languishing passion. It expresses itself through half repose and half movement. It is not the debasement of the human soul, but that moment of forgetfulness when the soul identifies itself with the senses and loses all desire to open itself to higher influences that uplift.]

[*The dance ends with a burst of applause from all but MAJNU, who is not much impressed. He leaves LUTFA, who goes to the other dancers; and then he goes to the window and looks out. Noise from without as at the close of LUTFA's dance. It ceases with the applause as before.*]

EUNUCH

[*Without L.*]

The court singer.

[*MAJNU turns around. Enter a white-bearded old man in a white turban and costume.*]

Layla-Majnu

MAJNU

Alekam, Baba!

SINGER

[*Saluting*]

At your service, Jahanpana.

MAJNU

You have been long coming, Baba.

SINGER

I was singing the Emperor [*at which word they almost wince, and look at him with attention*] to sleep.

MAJNU

He is better, then?

SINGER

Yes; he is.

MAJNU

Sovan Allah! Sing, Baba, sing; I want to rest.

[*They all cease talking and scatter about the room noiselessly. LUTFA goes near MAJNU and stands by him. Some of the dancers, being tired, sit on the floor, here and there.*]

SINGER

What shall I sing, Janab?

Layla-Majnu

MAJNU

Sing the song that soothes and calms.

SINGER

[*Melancholy Oriental strain*]

The moon with the stars
Holds her tryst:
The rose's lips redden with each
Amorous kiss,
That blushingly she slowly gives
To the wind's lips,
Not to bring them to her lover nightingale
Who, oh —
Faithless like her, sings of his love
For another.

The moon and her dear, smiling stars,
Their pure
And serene eyes twinkle not to
Reproach her;
They know ere the sun-glow limns
The East
With rose's blushes,
His broken heart will cease to beat
With her numb petals falling each by each.

[*As the song ceases they applaud. This time there is no noise without.*]

MAJNU

Sing another, Baba.

Layla-Majnu

[*They all drink wine, served by the slaves.
The musician does not take the proffered
wine.*]

SINGER:

The morning star,
Like a beacon afar,
Signs the sun from
The night's dark bourne
To dawn's waveless harbor.
The cheery shore-land
Sings its awakening welcome;
The green silent woodside
With bowed head abides
To do him honor, the golden sun.

[*Hardly have they ceased applauding, when
there enters an EUNUCH L.*]

EUNUCH

The Emperor sends for the court singer.

MAJNU

He was asleep!—

EUNUCH

Just awakened with pain—

SINGER

I have to go, Jahanpana.

Layla-Majnu

MAJNU

Alekam, Baba!

[*Exeunt L. SINGER and EUNUCH, after saluting MAJNU.*]

MAJNU

[*To LUTFA*]

Will you dance now? Dance the dance of night.
Dance.

[*LUTFA smiles at him coquettishly, then dances. The other dancers supplement her. It is the dance of passion triumphant. It is not brutal, but at times cruel. It is sensual but not vulgar. It is the dance of passion that is trying to become self-conscious, trying to be majestic like the soul and failing inevitably. Its voluptuousness is taken for its supreme victory. It is weary; it is half-hopeful, yet it is strong. Its languor is its power. Its slow movement is its real forcefulness. It is passion that does not have any purpose, afraid of its own monotony, yet triumphantly moves on, as if afraid to stop. Towards the last steps of the dance, the same noise is heard from without R., resembling the quarrel between a man and a woman. The end of the dance is somewhat awkward, as a SLAVE GIRL, evidently a beautiful Circassian maiden, half-*

Layla-Majnu

dressed, enters R., as if pursued by someone. Her scream is followed by a man's voice shouting without R. He follows her on with a scourge in his hand. The man is an ARAB EUNUCH. THE GIRL falls at MAJNU's feet, afraid and suppliant.]

MAJNU

What is this, in my palace?

EUNUCH

She has been dancing and neglecting her duty.

MAJNU

Dancing! Does she know how to dance?

EUNUCH

Jahapana, I don't know. She left her sword by the door, instead of keeping watch. She danced every time Lut—er—er— dancing was going on here. [They all look at THE SLAVE who is lying at MAJNU's feet.] I forbade her twice, yet she danced. I am going to scourge her.

MAJNU

Scourge her?

EUNUCH

Yes. She is but a slave.

Layla-Majnu

MAJNU

Slave! Isn't a slave human?

[*The EUNUCH bows his head.*]

MAJNU

Go; I will attend to scourging her.

[*He stretches his hand to raise her. Exit EUNUCH after an elaborate salaam.*]

MAJNU

[*To THE GIRL*]

Arise.

SLAVE GIRL

[*Rises*]

Jahapana—

MAJNU

Why were you dancing?

SLAVE GIRL

The dancing here was so different.

MAJNU

Different! What do you mean?

SLAVE GIRL

[*They all gather round her and watch her with great interest.*]

Layla-Majnu

In the mountains, people dance so differently.
At home, we dance like the stars that are like
the soul moving through the heavens.

MAJNU

Dance like stars that are like the soul?

LUTFA

Could you dance now?

MAJNU

Do you dance well?

SLAVE GIRL

I do not know.

OTHERS

[*Confusion and noise*]

Dance! Dance at once. Dance!

MAJNU

Dance, then.

SLAVE GIRL

Someone will have to sing——

MAJNU

Sing what?

Layla-Majnu

SLAVE GIRL

Sing of light, of death, and the soul that flies like
a bird lost beyond the clouds, into the heavens.

[*They all look puzzled.*]

MAJNU

The court singer——no——I may. I will try to
sing. Dance.

[*The gathering becomes much interested.*]

[*During the following dance MAJNU sings halfway or so, a wordless melody, then as the soul element enters into the dance-theme his voice lowers and gradually fades into silence. The SLAVE GIRL bows to him, then dances. It is at first a torture of mind and body. The body is intoxicated with its own exuberant voluptuousness. The senses triumph, although they are unable to hold themselves together. Everything seems to disintegrate under the pressure of this struggle between mind and body. The body could hardly stand any more. Then a numbness sets in. The soul renascent asserts itself. The body submits to the soul. The other dancers come and compliment the SLAVE GIRL. The movement increases intensely and gradually in rapidity. The soul is win-*

Layla-Majnu

ning. The body, hitherto wearied, now as if reinforced, makes a supreme effort to stir the success. But the soul wins. The soul leaves the now tired body and flies into diaphanous regions whence it came. There are but few movements now. The spirit has rediscovered itself. The ultimate is reached. The lights grow dim. Vague light of dawn enters the room through the windows. Faint noise from without R. waxes louder and louder. MAJNU gives a start. Looks R. From without R. a heavy voice says:

The Emperor is dead!

[MAJNU appears as if stunned.]

[With those words, a low, weird roll of a drum and a faint sound of a trumpet are audible from without. The dance ends slightly awkwardly.]

MAJNU [Half consciously]

Dead!

[The party commences to leave in silent haste. MAJNU looks at the vague light of the dawn. Hardly have they all (except the SLAVE DANCING-GIRL) gone off the stage R. and L., when enters COURT SINGER L., with a stringed instrument in his hands. The instrument has broken strings.]

Layla-Majnu

MAJNU

[*Perceiving him; eagerly, almost rushing to the old man.*]

Baba— Dead?

[COURT SINGER points to the instrument. Both of them now see the SLAVE DANCING-GIRL. She bows. MAJNU can find no words to say to her. The COURT SINGER gently strokes MAJNU's head with his right hand. With the accompaniment of almost inaudible music, the SLAVE GIRL bows to the dawn. Hardly has she finished bowing, when the roll of the drum without waxes louder. MAJNU is deeply perturbed; tries to control himself. Another roll of drums.

[The dawn is vague and shadowy. A nobleman does not like to show his emotion. Hence MAJNU's grief, if expressed, should be in a subdued fashion.]

[CURTAIN]

ACT III.

SCENE: Five years have passed. First flush of dawn. The stage looks like a playground of fantastic shadows. As with the progress of the sunrise the shadows dance out of sight, a lake like that of the first act is revealed, with a background of green trees, surrounding a cottage with thatched roof. Masses of flowers R. and L. There are broad marble steps leading down into the lake. One long, winding path right and another from the left lead to the steps. Morning melodies are being played on a flute from without R.

[As the shadows disappear completely, enter LAYLA, with a pitcher on her head, humming a melody that is in tune with the music of the flute. As she goes down the steps to fill the pitcher, she vanishes from sight. Just at that moment, a man's voice, singing, is heard from across the lake, supposedly from under the thatched roof.]

THE SONG:

The sun, radiant, embraces the earth with a
Thousand golden arms,
Like a mother that findeth her lost child
After a lifelong search.

Layla-Majnu

The trees shed their tears of dew in sheer
Joy and love.

Oh! To see such a meeting: to love like the sun!
To be found like the earth.

[*LAYLA is supposed to fill her pitcher during the song. Enter JESTER L., stealthily. He peeps into the lake; then, as the song ceases, burries off the stage L. LAYLA now comes up the steps with the filled pitcher on her head. Exit LAYLA, bumbling. The flute plays again as before. Enter TWO DERVISHES singing in tune with the flute:*]

What was writ has come to pass, like the sun
Leading the hosts of light from dark to dark;

What is done

Lives on. Who can stop Destiny's hand,
Gaunt and grim,

Moving ceaselessly on the dial of time,
Desolate, dim?

[*Exeunt L. Flute plays on.*]

[*Enter LAYLA with an empty pitcher. She is singing in tune with the flute. She goes down the steps to the lake.*]

What play this? the sun and the breeze
Make merry, merry with the rose.

The rippling waters cry or laugh — I know not.
The birds sing sweet and happy;

Layla-Majnu

My heart melts into tears, I know not why;
What play can this be!
The laughter of the lake and the breeze,
While the tears fill my eyes?

[*Toward the end of this song, she reaches the bottom step and thus vanishes from sight. From without R. a man's voice sings:*]

Giving is God's: the giver giveth,
As God giveth: the giver giveth God's gift.

[*LAYLA comes up the steps with a full pitcher and goes off R. The song is going on from without R., when MAJNU and JESTER enter, almost simultaneously with the ceasing of the song.*]

JESTER

I saw her there filling a pitcher.

MAJNU

There—— [*Perceiving the entrance R. of SHAH ALAM, whom MAJNU cannot recognize owing to the former's gray beard, long gray hair, and oldish features as well as gait.*] Have you——

SHAH ALAM

[*Taken aback*]

I——

JESTER

Have you seen a——

Layla-Majnu

SHAH ALAM

[*Aside thoughtfully*]

Allah! He looks like Majnu.

JESTER

Do you hear?

MAJNU

Who are you?

SHAH ALAM [*Taking courage*]

What are you seeking here?

JESTER

We are seeking for Lay——

MAJNU

What is your name?

SHAH ALAM

A poor beggar has no name.

MAJNU

Are not beggars named?

SHAH ALAM

But they always call them beggars; so in the course of time, they forget their names.

Layla-Majnu

MAJNU

Do you know who lives in yonder cottage?

[*Points across the lake to the background.*]

JESTER

Does Layla live——

MAJNU

[*After eyeing THE JESTER angrily*]

Have you ever seen anyone here who may be in
hiding?

SHAH ALAM

[*As calmly as possible*]

Some say a prince is hiding there.

JESTER

Ah! Shah Alam——

MAJNU

[*Stopping him with a glance*]

What is his name?

SHAH ALAM

I do not know; a beggar knows only the alms he
is given, and not the giver of them who is Allah.

Layla-Majnu

MAJNU.

Is there anyone else with him there?

SHAH ALAM

Why do you ask these questions, traveler? Do you have to know everything?

JESTER

We want to find Shah Alam and——

MAJNU

Dervish, have you ever heard whether prince Shah Alam be alive?

SHAH ALAM

[*With perfect calm*]

He may be alive, but it may be a living death that he lives.

MAJNU

Does the prince that lives there look like him?

SHAH ALAM

I never can tell. I saw prince Shah Alam but once; that was when he was protecting——
No——

MAJNU

Protecting whom?

Layla-Majnu

JESTER

Yes, yes!

SHAH ALAM

[*Alarmed*]

Two helpless women.

MAJNU

[*To JESTER*]

Shah Alam protecting helpless women?

JESTER

Even I cannot think of a jest like that.

SHAH ALAM

Is he not a prince?

JESTER

Yes; a very cruel one. How can that heart of his
pity and protect anyone?

SHAH ALAM

Do you not jest, my sir? What do you know of
the human heart? If you had suffered as he,
had you suffered like a beggar, as I, you would
not say that. That prince might have been
cruel and cunning once, but the miracle of Allah
might change even him.

Layla-Majnu

MAJNU

If he is changed and his heart has seen the way of
Allah, why does he hide with two women?

SHAH ALAM

Since a man has lost a kingdom, every hope, the
things that he thought to be the greatest, have
proved to be nothing! Why should he not
hide? There is a price on his head. If Majnu
had a little heart, he would not pursue Shah
Alam from one hiding-place to another, till he
is wearied, ill, and willing to give himself up to
the headsman.

MAJNU

I will——

JESTER

Show us where he is.

SHAH ALAM

So that you can take his head, and get the price —
money——

MAJNU

If he is what you say, I will forgive him.

SHAH ALAM

Who are you?

Layla-Majnu

JESTER

Oh, he is—

MAJNU

[*Calmly*]

I am Majnu.

JESTER

The king!

SHAH ALAM

I am Shah Alam!

[MAJNU and JESTER are taken aback.]

MAJNU

Sha—h A-l-a-m!

SHAH ALAM

Do you not recognize me, brother?

JESTER

Why, people say you are dead!

SHAH ALAM

There are no dead. How are you searching for
me, if I am dead?

MAJNU

Wild rumors. How old you look!

[51]

Layla-Majnu

SHAH ALAM

Five years are no short time when a man has to seek a new place of safety every day. When death stares one in the face — as it has been with me these five years — one ages fast. A man comes to death's door quicker by avoiding death.

[With the beginning of the following song, MAJNU gesticulates as if he recognized the voice. He is assailed by doubt and belief in turn. A conflict is raging within him.]

[From without R., LAYLA's voice is heard singing.]

Sorrow, you say, spreads her wings
To envelop my being!
Joy's chariot wheel's roll I hear
On the pavement of my dream.
Sad this hour, others think —
Joy's dawn, I seem to see,
On the brink of love's eternity.

MAJNU

[Speaking simultaneously with the song.]

A dream, is it? Who can this be? The cry of my soul I hear! Who—is—she—oh!—

[Enter LAYLA R. with the last words of her song. She has a pitcher with her.]

Layla-Majnu

MAJNU

Layla!

JESTER

Lay—l—

[LAYLA stops short, speechless.]

MAJNU

Shah Alam, you have lost a kingdom but have found Layla, whom all the kingdoms of earth cannot match.

SHAH ALAM

[Signing LAYLA to come nearer]

You wrong me, brother.

MAJNU [Almost furious]

Wrong you? Would not anyone give up kingdoms for her? Ah, you are a true lover—content to live as a beggar if you have her.

SHAH ALAM

I am a beggar.

MAJNU

Beggar to whom love has been given as alms. Ah, my fate! Allah!

[LAYLA and JESTER in consternation, do not know what to do.]

Layla-Majnu

SHAH ALAM

[*Putting his hand on MAJNU's shoulder.*]
Majnu, you can have Layla.

MAJNU

Marry my brother's wife? You talk like a holy
dervish.

SHAH ALAM

Do not hurt me, brother. Layla is not my wife.

MAJNU

Not your wife? How is she living with you?

SHAH ALAM

Let me tell you all. Come here, Layla; bear
witness to this. In the time of war, when
death and devastation were reaping their har-
vest, I was defeated, and took shelter under the
roof of Layla's mother. They needed a man's
protection, and I needed them. I have begged
to keep them and myself alive, but it was a
mother and sister that I was protecting.

MAJNU

Allah!

SHAH ALAM

Majnu, you won the kingdom from me.

Layla-Majnu

MAJNU

I do not want the kingdom.

SHAH ALAM

I did not give you the kingdom. I will give you Layla. Take her with love.

[*He takes LAYLA by the right hand and joins it to MAJNU's.*]

MAJNU

[*Taking her other hand with his*]

Do you give her to me?

SHAH ALAM

She loves you.

MAJNU

Layla! [*She looks down and blushes.*] Shah Alam, this gem of gems [*pointing to LAYLA*], this most gracious of all ornaments, this most wonderful of kingdoms, has no equal. Layla alone can equal Layla. You ask me to take her with love; how poor my love is when I compare it with the silent love that has grown from a drop into a sea in the solitude of her heart. Oh, Layla! Layla!—

JESTER

It is going to be a mad-day instead of midday.

Layla-Majnu

SHAH ALAM

Majnu—

MAJNU

Brother, my soul is filled to overflowing. What can I give you in return for what you have given me? You fought for the kingdom once; take it from me with the same love that has made you give me Layla. You will be a just and righteous king.

SHAH ALAM

I take the kingdom?

MAJNU

Yes. Ghor, Bonair, Maust, Kandahar, the vine-yards of Charut, wheat-yielding plentiful Maust, the city of Balkh with its shawl trade, the Mosque of Aziz, and the paradise city surrounded by the green hills where the spring comes the earliest and the winter is shortest: I ask you to take them. They are not mine. The crown jewels that have been won through fifty wars in the past three hundred years; the marble city of our capital, all the slaves, the great army, dancing girls bought with their weights of pearl and gold, and the musicians that sing the best in the world — they are all yours. Say yes, and the herald will announce

Layla-Majnu

through his trumpet made of molten gold and silver, inlaid with ruby and diamond: that from tomorrow, Shah Alam will be the Patishah, the Emperor. Take it, brother; I give it to you.

SHAH ALAM

[*As if resisting a temptation*]

No, not—

LAYLA

Are you ill, brother?

MAJNU

Shah A-l-a-m—

JESTER

[*Perplexed*]

Bismillah!

SHAH ALAM

I do not want it; I do not want it.

MAJNU

I will be happy with Layla in a beggar's cottage.
I want to make you happy. Give me an opportunity—

SHAH ALAM

I have found my kingdom—

Layla-Majnu

MAJNU

[*Eagerly*]

Accept it, then. Do you?

SHAH ALAM

[*Triumphantly pointing to his own heart*]

Oh, my kingdom is not there; it is here, brother.
Allah is my king, and I his humble slave. Ho,
Allah!

MAJNU

You will not take it?

SHAH ALAM

No. You may be happy in a cottage with Layla,
but she will be happiest in a palace. Why
take away that happiness from her?

LAYLA

No——

[*She cannot speak further*]

SHAH ALAM

I do not need it; I do not want an empire. The
free sky, the green earth, the whole world is my
kingdom now. All men and women are my
brothers and sisters. His rain will bathe my
head and His sun will keep me warm. The
lakes with their silver surface will serve as mir-
rors to my worn-out expression; and my dress

Layla-Majnu

will be that which His servants alone wear: the beggar's tunic. Oh, I am free! Layla, sister, be happy as the Papia that sings to the dawn; and noble as the peacock, that queen of the sunset hour strutting majestically on the marble wall of the Capital. Happy, happy, happy; everything speaks of happiness: I have found my kingdom. Majnu, grant me a boon.

MAJNU

It is granted.

SHAH ALAM

Some day, when the children come, teach your sons to love their brothers. Jealousy that made us so cruel to each other, let it be banished from your kingdom; let love be the law in your palace as well as everywhere in the empire. Then grant me this boon, too, before I depart. And—

MAJNU AND LAYLA

Where are you going?

SHAH ALAM

Calm yourselves. I intend to make a pilgrimage to Mecca

[*T*hey all make a short bow as they hear the word Mecca.]

Layla-Majnu

MAJNU

What else can we do? One more thing?

SHAH ALAM

If you please, from this day on, call your Capital
The City of Layla-Majnu, which means selfless-
love.

JESTER

Ho, Layla-Majnu, Layla-Majnu!

SHAH ALAM

[*Proceeding to go R.*]

Majnu-Layla!

MAJNU

Will you not come to our wedding?

SHAH ALAM

Are not your souls married? I will go to Mecca
now. On my return, Allah willing, I shall come
to see you. I am now a Dervish, Allah's eternal
servant. I live at His will, in His eyes.

MAJNU

In your eyes we are married. You are the priest
of Allah who has joined our hands in marriage.
Give us your blessing.

Layla-Majnu

SHAH ALAM

[Going to the extreme end of the stage R., turns around, faces them, raising his arms in benediction.]

Gal Sovan Allah: Illahi Il lilla: Allah ho Akbar!

[Music.]

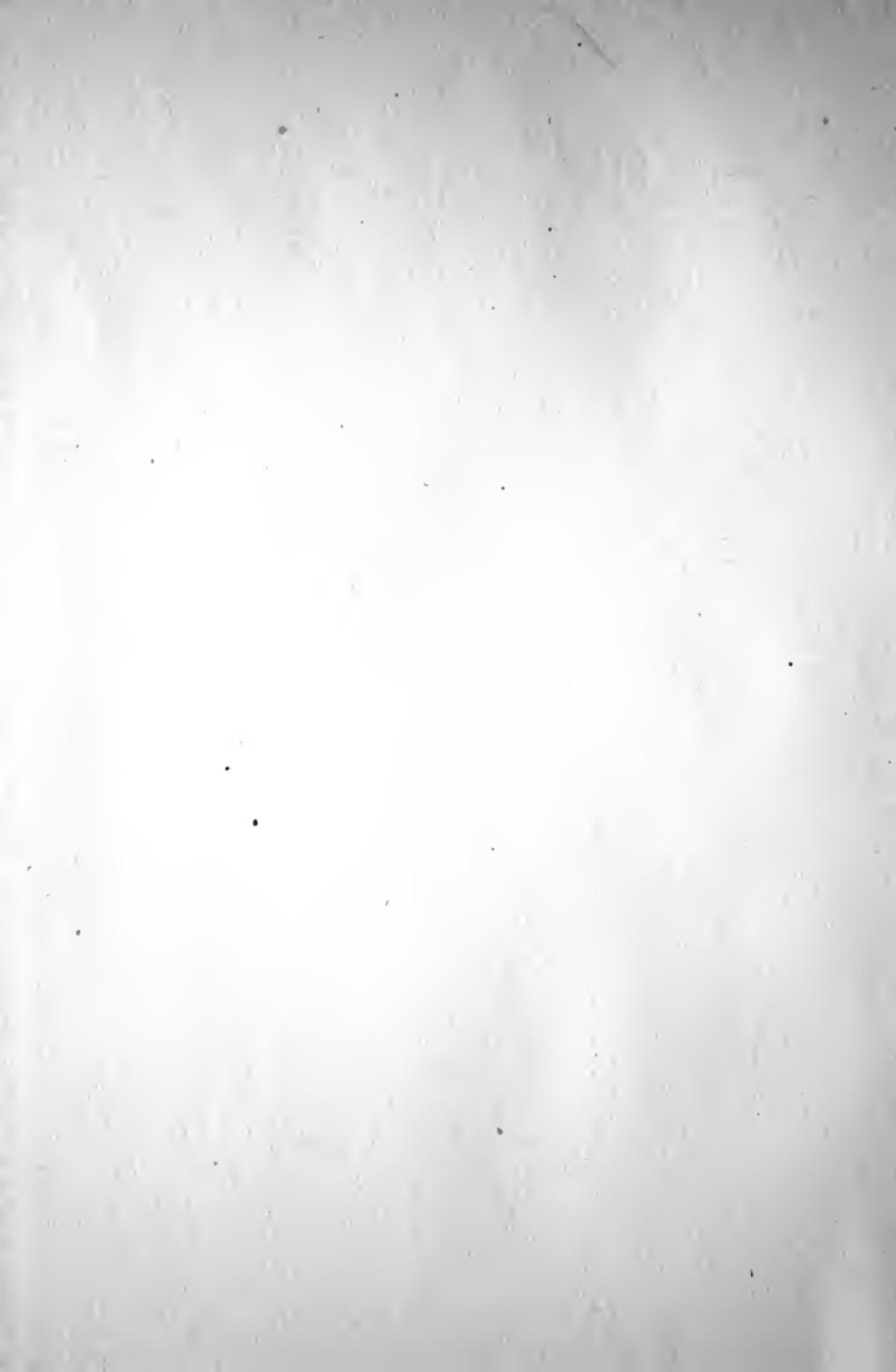
[The sun, shining on him from behind, almost transfigures him. MAJNU, LAYLA and JESTER kneel, and bow. SHAH ALAM proceeds to go off R.; his face to the light, that smites the two tear-drops from his eyes into almost iridescent lustre.]

[CURTAIN]





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